



Coast Guard HR Flag Voice 107

CREATING THE EXCEPTIONAL WORKPLACE -- BUILDING A "**STRENGTH-BASED**" ORGANIZATION (PART 1)

PREMISE: The World's Greatest Managers (Supervisors) Do Things Different than "Current Wisdom"

This Flag Voice begins a series on the themes from a recent book entitled "First, Break All the Rules: What the World's Greatest Managers Do Differently," by Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman. It has some extremely powerful messages for every one of us in the Coast Guard who desires to make their workplace (staff, unit) a high-performing team and boost retention.

What I found remarkably different, verses the hundreds and perhaps thousands of books, papers, articles, etc. on leadership and management, is refreshingly the concepts and conclusions drawn by the authors are based on extensive research and measurement. The book is the product of two mammoth research studies undertaken by the Gallup Organization over the last twenty-five years. The first focused on employees, asking, "What do the most talented employees need from their workplace?" Gallup surveyed over a million employees from a broad range of companies, industries and countries. They asked them questions on all aspects of their working life, then dug deep into their answers to discover the most important needs demanded by the most productive employees.

Their research yielded many discoveries, but the most powerful was talented employees need great managers. Those employees may join a company because of its generous benefits, pay options, and world-class training programs, but how long those employees stay and how productive they are is determined by the relationship with their immediate supervisor.

This discovery led to the second research effort: "How do the world's greatest managers find, focus, and keep talented employees?" This research included large and small companies, both privately held and publicly traded, and public sector organizations. They interviewed a cross section of their managers, both excellent and average. Most notably, they determined who was excellent and otherwise by collecting performance measures. Measures such as sales, profit, customer satisfaction scores, employee turnover figures, employee opinion data, and 360-degree surveys were all used. During the twenty-five years Gallup conducted one-and-one-half-hour interviews with over eighty thousand managers.

These managers were from all positions - some from executive level leadership positions, others midlevel managers, and yet others front-line supervisors. They all had one or more people reporting to

them. Who excelled at turning the talent of their employees into performance? Although these managers and leaders had very obvious differences in style, what, if anything, did they have in common? The authors found that the ideas are plain and direct, although not necessarily simple to implement.

Conventional wisdom believes each employee possesses unlimited potential, and the best way to help is by **fixing** the weaknesses. The concept is to treat everyone the same and avoid favoritism. The authors conclude conventional wisdom is comforting and too easy to develop programs for, but 180 degrees out of what is really necessary.

They found that the great managers **turn this convention on its head** (hence the title of the book). The great managers' path demands discipline, focus, trust, and most importantly a **willingness to individualize**. There are no new leadership theories or special management formulas. The research provides insights into the nature of talent and into the very best managers' methods of turning talent into lasting, and often exceptional, performance. The challenge for each of us to use these insights, with our own individual styles, one employee at a time, every day.

Next week: The Twelve Key Questions (Q12).

Regards, FL Ames

For more information about the research and book 'First Break All the Rules' please refer to web site <http://www.gallup.com/poll/managing/grtwrkplc.asp>

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